

Tennessee Pollution Prevention Partnership Success Story



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Re-Use Agreement Saves Money and Resources

The Member

S.E. International, Inc. is a small industry that has been a manufacturer and seller of ionizing radiation detectors since 1979. The company has 17 employees, 7 of them working in the production department. S.E. International has been dedicated to having a low impact on the environment since its beginnings and continues to look for opportunities to reduce waste, save natural resources, and prevent pollution.



The Story

The manufacture of ionizing radiation detectors includes a component called a Geiger-Mueller tube, which actually detects the radiation. S.E. International purchases this component from a supplier company, LND, Inc., located in Oceanside, NY. Some of the tubes are packaged and shipped in ½ gallon and 1-quart steel paint cans. For many years, S.E. International recycled these cans as a means of saving natural resources and reducing solid waste.

Although the general public often views recycling as a good method of waste reduction, there is

significant air pollution inherent in the recycling process. Some of it is produced off-site due to large amounts of energy required by the recycling process. Air emissions on-site come from the recycling process itself.

Steve Skinner, Product Development Engineer, knew that re-use of the cans would be preferable to recycling. He reported that he tried for years to get the supplier to take back the cans because they are in perfect condition even after shipment. S.E. International had already initiated other waste reduction measures in their shipping department, such as re-use of cardboard boxes; re-use of paper, magazines, catalogs, and junk mail through shredding for packing material; and re-use of packing peanuts.

The Success

Over a year ago, S.E. International was able to get agreement from the supplier to take back the empty cans for re-use. In 2001, over one thousand cans were returned to the supplier for shipment of Geiger-Mueller tubes, saving the tube manufacturer about \$2000 in purchasing costs for new cans.

The Pollution Prevented

In 2001, the return of cans to the supplier resulted in the re-use of 290 pounds of steel. S.E. International has seen an unprecedented increase in radiation detector orders since the terrorist attacks on the U.S. It is projected that in 2002, 1725 cans will be returned, resulting in the re-use of 485 pounds of steel and a savings of \$4075 for the tube manufacturer. A secondary but equally important benefit of this re-use project was prevention of the air pollution associated with the prior method of recycling the steel.